

The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost:

Acts 2:1-13

Assessment 1: Portfolio A

(textual analysis)

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There are many elements to consider when examining the Pentecost, including historical similarities, interpretation, prophecy, and belief. We will consider the significance of the existing practices of that time in relation to the Pentecost, the story as written by Luke in Acts, the prophetic influence and the relationship of the events of the Pentecost to current Pentecostal practices. Opposing views will be considered throughout to provide a balanced account. The literature reviews will be sourced from books – including online providers, and journals.

When examining what we associate today with the Pentecost, it is useful to look at the historical origins of the term Pentecost itself. Celebrated fifty days after the Passover; a festival which acknowledges the Israelites Exodus from slavery in Egypt, the Pentecost, also known as the ‘feast of weeks’, was representative of the spring grain harvest which began seven weeks before. Whether there is significance in the chronology of Jesus’ death and resurrection in relation to this festival is difficult to determine and has led to much debate.¹ There are other significant events linked to the period surrounding the Pentecost, such as the Shavuot (another term for Pentecost) celebration of renewing the covenant between God and the people, and the acknowledgement of God’s gift of the oral Torah to Moses at Mount Sinai.²

The account of the Pentecost can be found in Acts 2:11-22, written by Luke. It explains how ten days after Jesus’ resurrection, a gathering of approximately one hundred and twenty of Jesus’ followers encountered unusual phenomena in relation to sights and sounds, experiencing strange winds and fires. This occurred at Jerusalem, where they had been instructed by Jesus to wait in place until they were filled by the Holy Spirit.³ Luke describes the encounter as,

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appearing among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Luke’s writings include several examples of how the Holy Spirit worked through Jesus, and how he was blessed by God. Luke 3:22 reads, ‘And the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my son, the Beloved; with

¹ Lester L. Grabbe, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2022).

² Steve Werlin, *Bible Odyssey: Pentecost*, <<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/author/steve-werlin>> [accessed 04 January 2025].

³ F. Scott, Spencer, *Bible Odyssey: Pentecost in the Book of Acts*, < <https://wels.bibleodyssey.com/articles/pentecost-in-the-book-of-acts/>> [accessed 05 January 2025].

you I am well pleased.” Another observation of note is that Peter described the event as a fulfilment of the prophecy recorded in Joel, ‘...I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions’.⁴

It appears that Jesus wished to ensure the Holy Spirit be observed after his ascension to heaven, and that the events at the Pentecost were so powerful, and all encompassing in order to secure the belief. The location of the Pentecost also seems to be of significance, having been considered a most Holy place. As mentioned by Leonard Greenspoon, one account says that ‘God was at the highest peak of Jerusalem when he created the world...’. He also mentions a belief that there were two Jerusalems, one located on earth and another in heaven, but that this may have been as a consequence of the Hebrew ending for the word for Jerusalem being in the plural.⁵

The Pentecost has been described as the beginning of the Church, and Luke describes it as a kind of template for Christianity. However, contemporary understanding suggests that it was in addition to the ‘gifts’ imparted by God.⁶ Today’s Pentecostal practices are rooted in the belief that an individual should ‘experience’ the presence of the Holy Spirit and are geared less toward ritualistic practice to achieve this. However, Scripture is held in high regard, as it is seen as interpretation of God’s words. Monte Rice describes Pentecostal practices as possessing a ‘festive nature’, encouraging playful emersion into the remembrance of the Pentecost, in an attempt to truly ‘feel’ the Holy Spirit.⁷

The story of the Pentecost demonstrates the importance Jesus placed upon the connection to the Holy Spirit. Even after his death, resurrection and ascension to heaven, he continued to help the people through divine intervention. It is evident through Luke’s writings that he considered Jesus to be a primary source in delivering the Holy Spirit to mankind. We have also seen how the events of the Pentecost have influenced modern day Pentecostal practices, highlighting the endurance of its message throughout time. The significance of the event occurring during an already established festival period may be coincidental, or may hold some other meaning, which undoubtedly, will continue to be explored.

⁴ Mark Allan Powell, ed., *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, Abridged Edition*. Pentecost, (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009).

⁵ Leonard Greenspoon, *Bible Odyssey: Jerusalem*, < <https://www.bibleodyssey.com/articles/jerusalem/> > [accessed 05 January 2025].

⁶ Graham H. Twelftree, *Bible Odyssey: The Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts*, p.1 < <https://books.bibleodyssey.org/articles/the-holy-spirit-in-luke-acts/> > [accessed 05 January 2025].

⁷ Monte Lee Rice, ‘Toward a Pentecostal Theological Aesthetic and Practice of Sacred Time’, *Journal Of Pentecostal Theology*, 29 (2020,) 73-94. <research-ebSCO-com.ezproxy.uwtst.ac.uk> [accessed 18 January 2025].

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